

## **Statement of Sheriff Lloyd “Skip” Herrick Oxford County, Maine**

I have been the Sheriff of Oxford County, Maine, since 1991. Oxford County in rural western Maine encompasses 2,200 square miles with 55 municipalities and townships and approximately 54,000 year round residents. As both an elected official and law enforcement officer, I am acutely aware of how important reliable wireless service is to law enforcement, emergency medical services and economic development efforts. Unfortunately, wireless service is spotty and unreliable throughout much of Oxford County due to the inadequacy of wireless infrastructure and the County’s hilly terrain. I understand that the Maine PUC has earmarked additional funding to help Rural Cellular Corporation expand its wireless infrastructure in rural Maine but the funds have yet to be released by the FCC. I hope to explain the real life hardships that result when the expansion of wireless service infrastructure is postponed because of a lack of funding.

As the Sheriff, I am confronted on a daily basis with the negative impacts on law enforcement officers and operations from the lack of reliable cellular service. When an officer’s cell phone does not have service in a critical situation, the results can be frightening.

Often when officers are dispatched to a dangerous situation, they try to call the person causing the trouble to try to calm the person and determine if the person has a weapon. In other situations, in particular domestic violence situations, the officers try to call the complainant to get more information about the situation, in particular to determine whether there are weapons involved. However, all too often the officers’ cell phones have no service in these situations and the officers have to respond without knowing this critical information.

In one incident in Rumford, Maine, officers responding to a fatal car accident could not contact the necessary emergency services because of lack of service. In another incident in Porter, Maine, a man, after shooting off a number of bullets into a

crowd at a party, barricaded himself in his home along a busy road. The responding officer went to the man's house, but the absence of cell service meant that the officer could not call for back up.

Because many people have scanners which allow them to tune into emergency radio channels, use of VHF radios is problematic for us. Officers often need to communicate via cell phone with one another regarding investigations and tactics when at a scene or en route, but discussing this information over their VHF radios would be tantamount to broadcasting the information to those who are being targeted. When executing high risk search warrants, officers will call the dispatch office on their cell phones to alert them, so that if the situation gets out of hand, the dispatcher will know where to send help. Where there is no cell phone service, my officers either have to drive around in search of an area that has cell service or else find a pay phone, assuming there is time, because using their VHF radios could very well thwart their mission. Another problem associated with using a VHF radio is that we have a sizeable scanner community, and people hearing something interesting will drive to the scene of an accident or a volatile situation, complicating the situation for my officers.

Emergency medical technicians face similar problems from the lack of cell service. They can't call ahead on a VHF radio to advise the hospital of the condition of an injured party (or to receive advice on how to treat the party en route to the hospital) because they would be broadcasting confidential information. Not having reliable cell service means that calling for additional ambulances or a LifeFlight helicopter may not be possible. Cell phones clearly reduce emergency response time by law enforcement and emergency medical technicians which, in our profession, can mean the difference between life and death.

The lack of reliable cellular service constitutes a significant barrier to economic development in Oxford County. Oxford County, like much of rural Maine, is struggling to attract and keep businesses. Brett Doney, Chief Executive Officer of the Growth Council of Oxford Hills, says that the lack of cellular service really hurts Oxford County.

He makes his point by telling a story about trying to interest a visiting businessman in locating here. In the course of their tour, the businessman lost cell service on the way to the potential business site. The businessman turned to Brett and said “turn around, we’ve gone too far.” Brett tried to reassure the person that cellular service would be available again further down the road, but the damage was done: the businessman lost interest in the area due to the lack of cell service.

Oxford County would like to attract entrepreneurs who are starting home-based businesses which may eventually grow into larger businesses, providing employment opportunities as well as other economic benefits in the area. Although business people may be attracted to the rural character and excellent recreational opportunities that Oxford County provides, they simply cannot start their business where cellular service is often not available. As Mr. Doney states: “wireless communications has become, not a luxury, but an everyday tool for all kinds of business.”

The lack of cell service also is impacting Oxford County’s ability to attract so-called high-end vacationers. Many business people rely on cell service to stay connected with their offices and clients while on vacation. Without reliable cell service, Oxford County loses tourism opportunities as well as business opportunities.

As you can see, the lack of cellular infrastructure has very serious consequences for people in Oxford County and throughout rural Maine. When it comes to public safety, emergency response and economic development, the people of Oxford County are not getting the same level of service and do not have the same opportunities as our counterparts in urban and suburban Maine.

As I have tried to show in this Statement, the lack of cell service in Oxford County, and in other parts of rural Maine, constitutes a very real threat to the safety of our communities and to our economic well-being. I therefore urge the FCC to take whatever steps may be necessary to provide adequate funding to support the expansion of cell service in rural Maine.